

What is social media?

Social media platforms are increasingly important for both individuals and organizations. They can be accessed by either a smart phone or a private computer, as they need an **internet connection** to operate. By becoming a member of a social media platform, you have a quick and easy way to connect to people all over the world. Social media can be used to:

- Network with other professionals
- Share news items
- Share photographs and videos
- Advocate for policy change
- Promote behaviour change
- Organize or take part in campaigns
- Exchange your thoughts and opinions with others
- Stay up-to-date on the latest news
- Promote accountability from the grassroots

How civil society organizations use social media

Social media platforms are one of the highest-impact and most cost-effective ways that CSOs can tell the world what they are doing, what they need, and what they advocate for. Basic membership is free, and users can be found in every country. The most popular platforms have **between 100 and 900 million active users**.

To use social media effectively, you must determine:

1. **What you can do**, given the resources you have – e.g. time, people, internet access
2. **What you are interested in doing** – this is important, because if you are not interested in it, you will not be effective on the platform
3. **The purpose of your social media interactions** – find supporters? Raise awareness? Publicize your work? Learn from others?
4. **Which platforms** are most likely to help you achieve your purpose

Blogging is a popular social media tool. A blog is a simple web page where you post short writings to discuss a theme (e.g. human rights and immunization), present information (e.g. your favourite soup recipe), or promote an issue (e.g. vaccine finance reform). Most blogs have a “comments” feature that readers can use to rate, react to – or even discuss – what you have written.

There are also **user-feedback platforms** that allow you to rate goods or services or join an online discussion. Some of the most popular internationally include Amazon, TripAdvisor, and GoodReads. **Discussion forums** are common on many specialist websites.

Many platforms **link** to other platforms. If you post a photograph on Instagram, for example, you can simultaneously have it posted to your Twitter and Facebook feeds.

What other platforms are available?

All of the following social media platforms are used by civil society organizations:

1. **Facebook.** With 900 million users, this is the world's largest social network. Use this to share information on your activities, interests, and whereabouts, and comment on what others share. Users can "like" companies and organizations, like CSOs, and follow their updates. **Most effective for:** creating a circle of supporters and keeping them updated on what you are doing, planning, and advocating for
2. **Twitter.** Share news updates, links or one-liners 140 characters at a time with this social platform, which lets you communicate with and follow people from around the world. There are almost 300 million active users. Media campaigns are frequently run via Twitter. **Most effective for:** sharing real-time updates on your work; curating online discussions; launching "thunderclap" and "hashtag" advocacy campaigns; gathering news and ideas from diverse sources
3. **Instagram.** With 300 million users, this is the most popular way to share photos and videos. Link Instagram to your other social media accounts for a bigger impact. **Most effective for:** using photo and video to promote your work, find supporters, and publicise what is happening in your community or country
4. **Tumblr.** This is a micro-blogging platform that hosts 77 million blogs. Maintain your own blog or share others' blog posts. **Most effective for:** sharing human interest stories; sharing your analyses, reflections, and opinions; discovering innovations
5. **LinkedIn.** The world largest professional network, there are more than 160 million LinkedIn members in 200 countries. Use this app to network with peers, look for jobs, and recruit for your organization. **Most effective for:** networking; finding supporters; recruiting staff; reading about issues specific to your industry
6. **Pinterest.** This is a visual bulletin board for personal and shared use. "Pin up" the things that interest you, and browse through what others are sharing. **Most effective for:** Finding resources targeted to your specific needs; advocacy; networking; publicising your work
7. **Reddit.** The internet's most popular message board, use this to submit stories, see what is most popular, and vote for what interests you. **Most effective for:** staying current with the latest news; sharing your news and seeing how others rate your work; learning about the types of articles that readers enjoy.
8. **YouTube.** This is the internet's most popular way to share and access videos. After setting up a free account, you can upload videos that you have made, rate other people's videos, and make yourself a play list. **Most effective for:** sharing videos

For more information

- [The Beginner's Guide to Tumblr](#)
- [The Beginner's Guide to Reddit](#)
- [The Beginner's Guide to Instagram](#)
- [The Beginner's Guide to Twitter](#)
- [The Beginner's Guide to Facebook](#)
- [The Beginner's Guide to LinkedIn](#)
- [The Beginner's Guide to Pinterest](#)